



Worker-Peasant Monument, Moscow

## National-Scale Democracy

We have founded this study of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) on the practical necessity, as well as the historical fact, of class alliance, and most pointedly on Lenin's report to the 2CCI on 26 July 1920, on the National and Colonial Question.

A class alliance, or in other words a popular front, or a unity-in-action, was always necessary for the defeat of colonialism. Such class alliances were successfully put together in many countries, including South Africa, as the tactical road to strategic political independence.

Such an alliance is what is broadly known as a National Liberation Movement. What the movement is supposed to do is called the National Democratic Revolution. As much as it was nationalist, the anti-colonial liberation movement was equally international in character. The Worker-Peasant Alliance (hammer and sickle) is not just a Russian thing. It is universal.

The NDR's international dimension is solidarity with the National Liberation struggles of others, in the common fight against Imperialism.

### **Expansion of democracy**

The National Democratic Revolution's national dimension was the enlargement of democracy. This the Imperialists invariably opposed with divide-and-rule schemes of provincial federation, regionalism, "Balkanisation" *et cetera*. Hence the continuing struggle against Provincialism, and the on-going defence of Provincialism by the reactionary remnants in our country, South Africa, today.

We now need to look specifically at the expansion of democracy to the national level. Why? Because, for revolutionary purposes, the entire working class, and the entirety of the allied classes, must unite all of their potential support, in numerical, and in territorial terms. This is a practical necessity, if the liberation forces are to defeat the well-concentrated class enemy, which is the monopoly and Imperialist-allied bourgeoisie.

The battle to spread democracy to the farthest corners of the country, and to the whole population in terms of class, race and gender, is also the battle against regional and ethnic chauvinism. This effort aims to create a centralised parliamentary democracy, or democratic republic, even if, as Lenin pointed out in the report to the 2CCI, such a democratic republic can only be bourgeois in nature - at first.

The structure of parliamentary democracy (i.e. the democratic republic) is the organising scheme within which the polity at the national scale is conceived and arranged. It is not sufficient in itself. It is a shell that must be populated with organised elements, elements which must also be extended to the national scale, just as much as the parliamentary franchise is.

Among these organised elements are:

- The mass movement of national liberation
- The vanguard party of the working class
- The national (industrial) trade unions and their national centre
- Class-conscious national media of communication
- Many mass organisations at the national level, including Women's and Youth organisations.

Communists can be found organising, educating and mobilising, as is their duty according to the SACP Constitution, in all of these areas, and this has been the case

throughout the 90 years of the Party's life. The texts that are collected together in the linked document below clearly demonstrate that the communists, even before the formation of the Party, were concerned with the extension of organisation to all parts of the population.

## **Early years of the Communist Party of South Africa and the ANC**

The attached document, which is itself a compilation, shows that one predominately-white precursor of the Party was acutely aware that its own aspirations could not be fulfilled unless the Black Proletariat was mobilised to take the lead in the struggle. This precursor was the International Socialist League. It, like Lenin, had opposed the Imperialist war that broke out in 1914. It was later to become a component part of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) on its formation in 1921. "No Labour Movement without the Black Proletariat," it said.

After its 1921 formation, the Party quickly became predominantly black in membership, and the black cadres soon exercised a leading role in mass organisations, of which the biggest, in the 1920s, was the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), formed in 1919. Note that the (white) Labour Party had been formed in 1908, and the African National Congress in 1912.

The expulsion of communists from the ICU, and in particular of **J.A. (Jimmy) La Guma**, ICU General Secretary; **E.J. Khaile**, ICU Financial Secretary and **John Gomas**, Cape Provincial Secretary, was a set-back for the working class and as it

turned out, it was fatal for the ICU. This episode is also recorded in the attached document.

In 1927 **Josia Gumede** was elected ANC President and he travelled to meet the top leadership of the Soviet Union. That year was the tenth anniversary of the Russian revolution. He travelled with Jimmy La Guma, a member of the party, secretary of an ANC branch in Cape Town and a recently-expelled leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU). La Guma was expelled by the ICU together with E.J Khaile for being communists. In that very same year Khaile was elected Secretary-General of the ANC at its national conference in 1927.

The CPSA and the ANC drew closer together, though not without problems. But the alliance was endorsed by the Sixth Comintern Congress in the famous “**Black Republic Thesis**” resolution, which said among others:

*“The Party should pay particular attention to the embryonic national organisations among the natives, such as the **African National Congress**. The Party, while retaining its full independence, should participate in these organisations, should seek to broaden and extend their activity...*

*“In the field of trade union work the Party must consider that its main task consists in the organisation of the native workers into trade unions as well as propaganda and work for the setting up of a South African trade union centre embracing black and white workers.*

*“The Communist Party cannot confine itself to the general slogan of ‘Let there be no whites and no blacks’. The Communist Party must understand the revolutionary importance of the national and agrarian questions.*

*“A correct formulation of this task and intensive propagation of the chief slogan of a **native republic** will result not in the alienation of the white workers from the Communist Party, not in segregation of the natives, but, on the contrary, in the building up of a solid united front of all toilers against capitalism and imperialism.”*

In the attached document, the Comintern resolution is followed by the famous **Cradock Letter** written by Moses Kotane in 1934, five years before he became General Secretary of the Party. It called for the “Africanisation or Afrikanisation” of the CPSA, something that had clearly not yet fully taken place in 1934, five years after the adoption of the “Black Republic Thesis”.

The story continues in the next instalment.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Black Proletariat, ICU, Black Republic Thesis, Kotane’s Cradock Letter.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)